



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **State Health Department Issues Hantavirus Disease Warning**

BISMARCK, N.D. – People who are cleaning cabins or other buildings that had been closed for the winter should protect themselves against hantavirus, a disease transmitted by infected mice, according to the North Dakota Department of Health.

“Hantavirus infection has been associated with cleaning or occupying previously vacant cabins or other dwellings,” said Michelle Feist, epidemiologist with the Department of Health’s Division of Disease Control. “It’s important to take precautions while cleaning buildings infested with rodents. Preventing infection is important since there is no cure and the disease can be fatal.”

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a viral infection that causes severe lung disease. Infected rodents spread the virus in their urine, droppings and saliva. The virus may be transmitted if an infected rodent bites someone, but is mainly transmitted to people when they breathe in air contaminated by the virus. The deer mouse is the primary carrier of the virus.

The Department of Health offers the following tips for cleaning a rodent infested building to prevent hantavirus infection:

- Ventilate the space by opening the doors and windows for 30 minutes, and leave the area during this period.
- Do not stir up dust by sweeping or vacuuming up droppings, urine or nesting materials.
- Wear gloves and use disinfectant when cleaning up dead rodents or their urine, droppings and nests.
- Mop floors and clean countertops, cabinets and drawers with disinfectant.

Symptoms of HPS usually occur two to three weeks after infection. Early symptoms commonly include fever, muscle and body aches, fatigue, headache, dizziness, chills, nausea and vomiting. The illness worsens within a short period of time to include coughing and severe shortness of breath when lungs fill with fluid.

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Eleven cases of HPS have been reported to the North Dakota Department of Health since 1993, when it was first recognized in the United States. Six of these cases were fatal. Through Dec. 31, 2011, 587 cases have been reported in the U.S., of which 36 percent have resulted in death. It is also worth noting that about 75 percent of all cases in the U.S. have occurred in residents living in rural areas.

For more information, contact Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

*Please note:*

*A fact sheet containing important precautions to minimize the risk of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome infection is available at [www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf](http://www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf).*

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